

23 September 1984

EXCERPTED

SAM DONALDSON

GEORGE WILL

Sen. JOSEPH BIDEN, D., Delaware

DONALDSON: Well, administration officials say the same thing as Mr. Rumsfeld told us earlier in this broadcast. That is, that it's state-sponsored terrorism with which we're dealing, Libya and Syria and Iraq and Iran and other states. If that is the case, why should we not retaliate in the strongest way, when our people are killed, against those states? BIDEN: You know, I sit on the Intelligence Committee, I sit on the Foreign Relations Committee and I hear these statements about state-sponsored terrorism. And then we sit there and we ask them, who, how, where and when and what are you going to do about it? And we're told, 'We're not certain.' As recently as Friday, I asked for a briefing from the CIA, a private briefing. They sat with me and said that they were not at all certain who was responsible.

WILL: Are the standards of proof too high? I mean, we've got a sort of Warren Court fastidiousness here. BIDEN: No, I think we have two things. I think number one, we need, we have a shortcoming in terms of intelligence capability and that, in fact, is something that can't be remedied in the short term, because the only way you're going to find out about these organizations is to infiltrate them and they take a long time to do. That is not done overnight. You don't change the telemetry of a satellite to impact on that. But the second thing is that I quite frankly think that this administration's figured out that it's very complicated world out there and, in fact, that if you find out what particular individual or small group may be responsible, and to my knowledge they hadn't even done that...

BRINKLEY: This is a case where it's known precisely. In London, somebody in the Libyan Embassy opened fire on a crowd in the street, killed an English policewoman. The British essentially did nothing, sent them home on a private plane, taking all their junk with them. Secretary Shultz since then has said countries may not punish outlaw countries for fear of losing commercial opportunities.

BIDEN: I think that's ridiculous. I think that's ridiculous. And I think that there are ways...

BRINKLEY: What is ridiculous? BIDEN: That notion that for fear of losing commercial opportunities, you are not going to punish. The fact of the matter is, I don't see, there's nothing at all wrong with us making life extremely miserable for Khadafy personally and for Libya generally,

Continued

notwithstanding the loss of economic opportunities that may afford for certain Western communities. But that's

...

DONALDSON: You said a moment ago that perhaps we had not identified specifically the target. It seems to be understood that four Americans recently kidnapped in Lebanon, a diplomat, a journalist, a passenger, et cetera... We know where they are, we know where they are being held. They are hostages. They are Americans. Why don't we go free them? BIDEN: Two reasons. One--and I'm not the spokesperson for the administration--but I suspect the two answers you'd get would be, number one, we're concerned that in going after them we may have them forfeit their lives.

DONALDSON: Isn't that a legitimate concern? Jimmy Carter sat on that concern for a year. BIDEN: Oh, I think it is, but I'm answering the question. The answer is yes, that's the first question. The second answer I suspect you would get is that you may very well complicate very complicated circumstances which are being worked on diplomatically in the Middle East.

DONALDSON: Let me get his opinion. Should we go get them? BIDEN: The answer is, not if it would cost their, not if we think that it would ensure the forfeiture of their lives. That's a judgment I've got to look to the intelligence community for.

WELL: Let me take you up on the valuation of human life. If we can't retaliate and if we can't stop these attacks, then maybe we should quit making so much of them. We should say, 'When you have a nation with 100 million vehicles on the road, you have traffic accidents. When you have a nation of 230 million that's a superpower, you're going to have attacks on it and lives are going to be lost. That's part of the life of a superpower. Let's not devote Sunday mornings to talking about it.' BIDEN: I disagree with the two premises you've stated, though. I think there was something that could have been done to stop this, number one. Number two, there are means by which we can retaliate. The question is, when I sit there as a United States senator and I ask our experts, the Defense Department and the CIA, I say, 'Now who done it, who done it? Tell me the person. What is the group?' And they look me straight in the eye and they come back and say, 'We are not certain.' Now, so I sit there as one of the policymakers lower down the line and I say, 'All right, fine, when are you going to find out who did it and when are you going to come back and tell us?' In the meantime, I listen to a president stand there, as other presidents have, and say, you know, this is a horrible thing and we are going to retaliate, we'll take any action and that's what should stop. We should either put it or shut up.

\* \* \* \* \*

EXCERPTED